



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

Belle de Jour by Luis Bunuel

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enough to help her explore her instinctive rebelliousness so that it grows into genuine self-knowledge and integrity. He could help her shake off her parents' values, and at the same time, if he would let her, she could help him overcome his defensiveness and his intellectual detachment from life.

This intuitive understanding of what they can offer to each other gives their scenes together great vitality—at least the scenes with dialogue. Unfortunately, when he wants to create a “visual” romantic scene, Larry Peerce returns to Marlboro country—slow-motion swimming scenes, soft-focus shots of the lovers riding bicycles through the woods. Peerce has not the slightest feeling for cinematic movement or imagery; the photography and cutting in this film are pretty consistently poor. But to say that Peerce is a poor director is only half of the truth; he is a poor director of the resources of film, but he is a very fine director of actors (a gift that was intermittently apparent even in his two forgettable preceding films, *One Potato Two Potato* and *The Incident*). Peerce's sensitivity to people pays off in the astonishing rapport that Richard Benjamin and Ali MacGraw show when they are playing together. Their love scenes are frank, tender, witty, passionate, exhilarating.

Because the love scenes *are* so charming, the ultimate failure of their love is all the more affecting. The dialogue in the bleak parting scene is Roth's, but the direction and playing of the scene once again complicate Roth, and make it difficult to side with Neil against Brenda. He is almost certainly right that she must have deliberately—though unconsciously—left the diaphragm at home so that her mother would find it and thus give her an excuse to end the relationship. And yet Neil is quite harsh in this scene, almost relieved to find Brenda guilty. As he accuses her of betraying their love, he never once looks at her; he stares straight ahead, implacably passing sentence on her, and then almost compulsively picks up her father's letter to mock it: “Why does your father capitalize all these letters?” Scorn is

Neil's only natural reflex. It is clear to us—but not to Neil—that Brenda needs *help*; if she left the diaphragm deliberately, it was not out of bitchy connivance but out of fear and desperate confusion. But he is unwilling to acknowledge the confusion of her feelings; he wants an easy explanation and a quick resolution. Whether they would ever be able to work out the overwhelming problems between them is uncertain, but what is most interesting is how reluctant Neil is even to try. His lack of generosity to Brenda is depressing. The film's first impression may be its fifties-style social satire, but its strongest impression is its pained, bitter vision of young love—love too weak to compete with Brenda's social conditioning and Neil's self-satisfied morality. Peerce is technically clumsy, his *mise en scène* is dated, but *Goodbye, Columbus* lives because it pricks romantic movie fantasies with an unsparing skepticism that is not just timely, but timeless too.

—STEPHEN FARBER

BELLE DE JOUR

Director: Luis Buñuel. Script: Buñuel and Jean-Claude Carrière, based on the novel by Joseph Kessel. Photography: Sacha Vierny.

In *Belle De Jour*, Buñuel again subverts reality by creating a character whose emotional isolation makes “everyday life” as remote and fantastic as a dream. One way Buñuel achieves this validation of fantasy is by his choice of an elegant, “traditional,” visual style, a neutral camera position, and simple, straightforward editing.

Buñuel cuts back and forth between fantasy, dream, and reality very economically and without self-conscious structural emphasis.* There

*Allied Artists, the American distributor, has seen fit to equip the print distributed here with italic subtitles for the fantasy and dream sequences. Though Buñuel does use bells and other sound cues to introduce these sequences, italicized subtitles interject an anti-surreal formalism that impedes the free flow of association.

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are no shock cuts or wildly differing shot lengths. He only uses one dissolve, near the end of the film: a double image of autumn trees moving against the apartment building where Séverine and Pierre live. The way the shot is composed it could actually be a straight shot, but it works like a dissolve because it suggests a compound linkage between the autumn woods of Séverine's fantasies and the prison flat she seeks to escape.

Sacha Vierny's camera establishes a cool middle distance and rarely deviates from it. An occasional long shot is introduced to great effect, such as the carriage shots in the beginning and end, but rarely does the camera come any closer to the actors than a head and shoulders close-up. Even hands and feet are established in a setting, as when we see Séverine's hands nervously stroking a marble table top, or her feet walking up the tacky art-nouveau staircase to Mme. Anais' *maison de rendez-vous*. This middle-distance camera establishes a cool objectivity which enables Buñuel to show us erotic dualism without tipping the scales for or against fantasy or "real life."

Sound patterns are as revealing as images in this film. Raymond Durnat has suggested that *Belle de Jour* can be seen as Séverine's attempt to create her own movie. Sounds serve as clues to Séverine's relative states of mind, and by summoning up varying combinations, Séverine modulates and varies her own score.

For instance, in the opening scene where she imagines herself and Pierre riding through the woods in a landau, we hear carriage bells intermixed with the melancholy of a train whistle. This combination of sounds establishes two modes of perception: Séverine is creating a synthesis between the (presumed) imagined carriage bells and the (presumed) real train whistle.

The carriage sounds change in the final scene. When Husson tells Pierre about her life as a prostitute, Séverine retreats to fantasy again. With this knowledge Pierre has regained his moral superiority and with it, the power of isolating Séverine. Thus he becomes "revived"



BELLE DE JOUR

in Séverine's eyes and her guilt feelings drive her back to masochism. In her final fantasy, the carriage returns empty and we hear the meowing of cats mingled with the sound of bells. Two imagined sounds have merged, and we are left with the assumption that Séverine has moved completely into the world of fantasy.

The punning references to cats that recur throughout the movie are one way that Buñuel hints at Séverine's sexual fears. In her fantasies, cats are whips or fetishes. In the opening scene with the coachman, Séverine asks the one with a whip not to let the cats loose. In the dream which ends when Pierre and Husson pelt her with mud she asks if bulls have names like cats ("expiation and remorse"). In her fantasy about the necrophiliac duke, cats are actually present, but their role remains veiled.

Following this line a bit further, Séverine's fantasy about the necrophiliac duke can be seen as her attempt to reinstate herself in her own self-esteem after she had failed at playing an aggressive role with Mme. Anais' masochistic client. This scene is one of the funniest and saddest that Buñuel has ever done—full of marvelous touches like the doctor's happy anticipa-

tory expression as he opens his suitcase full of gadgets, and his impatient "Not yet!" when Charlotte begins to hurry through her accustomed role.

When Séverine watches Charlotte whip the doctor she is seeing one of her own masochistic fantasies being acted out, and the sight repels her. To compensate, she invents an entirely passive part for herself in the next fantasy: that of a dead child who is nonetheless sexually attractive. Her choice of this particular role combines her needs for erotic role-playing, expiation (the duke invites her to take part in a "religious ceremony"), and punishment (she is thrown out of the chateau when the ceremony is over).

Other punning images exist in temporal succession and establish narrative connections. The fire in which Séverine burns her panties after her first day with Mme. Anais becomes the dream campfire which cannot warm the soup Pierre and Husson are cooking, and later crackles in the salon of the necrophiliac duke. Buñuel uses literal reality—things photographed as we know them to exist in three-dimensional space rather than juxtaposed into atypical relationships—to give an implicit authority to Séverine's fantasies. To paraphrase Bazin, the camera creates factual hallucinations.

Séverine places her fantasies in an elaborate romantic world of candlelit chateaux, coaches and footmen, and black-clad figures duelling at dawn. A fairy-tale world such as this is a familiar setting for frightening childhood fantasies, and Buñuel has long been observing the dark side of childhood. In his movies, as in the unbowlerized fairy tales of Grimm and Perrault, children are often the innocent victims of a particularly nasty fate. Two flashbacks to Séverine's own childhood indicate the patterns of fixation and guilt that she seeks to escape: in one she is furtively caressed by a heavy-handed workman, and in the other she turns away from a priest offering the communion Host. In the bordello, the maid's small daughter is shown as a potential victim of Mme. Anais, and Charlotte's reference to the Aberfan

disaster in the newspaper establishes a link to another childhood fear—that of being buried alive. To Buñuel, childhood is a monstrous trap and there is nothing romantic to him about innocence.

Buñuel's trapped victims often find that they must fall back upon atavism to become free: the sacrifice of the child in *Diary of a Chambermaid*, the repetition ritual at the end of *The Exterminating Angel*. Séverine seeks total freedom, but to achieve this she invents elaborate rituals of humiliation and servitude.

Buñuel establishes the relationships inside the house of Mme. Anais with great care. Mme. Anais, whose cashmere sweaters and *comme il faut* manners barely conceal a monstrous feral possessiveness, commands a nursery-schoolgirl world of treats and punishments. Each customer brings a special climate of feeling with him, and so the women wait with happy anticipation, boredom, or nervous apprehension. Husson had called them "enslaved women," but Mathilde and Charlotte are actually commonsense working girls who depend on what the day brings for gratification and reward. They admire Séverine's St. Laurent wardrobe, but go about their jobs with no apparent need for her shuttle routes between conscious and unconscious experience.

Séverine is also playing a game with herself all through the film, assembling a private collection of image-feeling clusters which make more sense to her, logically and erotically, than her life as the wife of a rich bourgeois doctor in Gaullist France. The film eventually becomes Séverine's own surrealist creation, like the game called "*le cadavre exquis*" which was invented by Breton and his friends in Paris during the twenties. In this game, drawings or poems were created by each participant adding a line without seeing what had gone before. The fact that Séverine herself plays the role of an exquisite corpse in one of her fantasies is perhaps coincidental, but nonetheless interesting.

Buñuel's connection with the early surrealist movement in Paris is well-known. To the surrealist philosophers, dreams, fantasies, and even

madness were considered legitimate escape routes from the snares of reality. Automatic writing, "exquisite corpse" drawings, *frottage*, and even hysterical states were utilized as avenues to the psychic automatism which expressed the unconscious. The first *Surrealist Manifesto* hailed Freud for "recovering the rights of the imagination". And later on Breton and Aragon were to enthusiastically state that "hysteria is not a pathological phenomenon and can be considered in every respect a supreme means of expression."^{*}

Sévérine's story is a narrative based on the logic of the unconscious, and as such, *Belle de Jour* becomes an essentially surreal work. "We are all at the mercy of the dream," wrote the editors of *La Revolution Surrealiste*, "and we owe it to ourselves to submit to its power in the waking state."† Since Buñuel made two important early surrealist films, *Le Chien Andalou* and *L'Age d'Or*, it is hardly surprising that his later work should also reveal affinities with surrealism.

However, since the early films, Buñuel's imagery has become less emblematic and polymorphous, and less concerned with conventional surrealist iconography. In *Belle de Jour* it is the fact that the narrative structure alternates between fantasy and reality without establishing priorities between them which provides the film's surreal frame of reference. The dead donkeys and truncated hands typical of early emblematic surrealist imagery have been discarded in favor of a cinematic narrative which expresses surrealism's original iconoclastic spirit.

—MARGOT S. KERNAN

^{*}Louis Aragon and André Breton, "The Quinquagenary of Hysteria," from *La Revolution Surrealiste*, No. 11, March 1928. Quoted in Patrick Waldberg, *Surrealism* (New York: McGraw-Hill), p. 62.

†J. A. Boifford, P. Eluard, R. Vitrac, *La Revolution Surrealiste*, No. 1, December 1924. Quoted in Waldberg, p. 47.

VIVA AND LOUIS

A film by Andy Warhol (also known as "Blue Movie" and "Fuck").

"If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface: of my paintings and films and me, and there I am. There's nothing behind it."—From an interview with Gretchen Berg, *Cahiers du Cinéma* in English, May, 1967.

I see no reason not to take Warhol at his word. His marvelously banal interviews prove the point, and when reading them one is struck with a certain integrity, a sense that the different parts of him fit perfectly together. To be sure, there's nothing "behind" his emptiness, the celebrated nullity of works and personality; and with that lucidity that forms his one admirable characteristic, and that appears to be denied to many of his enemies, Warhol knows exactly where to place himself—"I could be forgotten tomorrow." Much of the reaction to Warhol has been muddled, personal, and beside the point. People respond with defensive annoyance and indignation or, much worse, desperate attempts to get with it and find something complex and revelatory. My favorite in this genre is the writing of Gregory Battcock in *Film Culture* and his anthology, *The New American Cinema*, particularly his ineffable "interpretation" of *Empire*, the eight-hour moving-still picture of the Empire State Building (e.g., "Sound is dispensed with also, and its absence is consistent with the object photographed, since the Empire State Building does not, *qua* building, make noise").

No matter how one writes about Warhol, he gets the last laugh. With his recent activities, he has managed to extend the subject matter of movies beyond permissiveness into the range of profitable scandal, make some money, find employment for his friends, and—what is least important to him—gain acceptance in certain quarters as a leader of the New York avant-garde. All this has been accomplished without producing anything of more than marginal